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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Georgia Mountains Region is thriving. Even in times where unemployment rates remain high, local governments are investing in their future. The region is a leader in the State of Georgia and strongly involved in transportation, water, renewable energy, broadband, and tourism development for long term economic sustainability and improved quality of life for the 647,976 residents that call the Georgia Mountains home.

The ability to efficiently and safely move people, goods, and information is a crucial element to the economic health of the Georgia Mountains Region. As outlined in the 2014 Highlights Section of this report, the GMRC region cannot survive without a strong and reliable infrastructure network consisting of transportation, water and wastewater, communication, and energy efficient practices. The region needs to make sound investments in road, water, sewer, and telecommunications or maintain infrastructure in a manner that is supportive of the region's economic goals. Broadband capacity – backbone networks, redundancy, and connectivity continue to be a priority for industry recruitment and retention in the Georgia Mountains Region.

Region 2 experienced a year of significant growth and prosperity with **1,773 jobs created** and **\$313,120,000 in private investment generated**. Small businesses and entrepreneurs are the lifeblood of the economy, particularly in the rural mountain communities. As outlined in this Annual Update, local communities need to partner with the education system and other small business networks to improve the small business environment with business assistance services, access to capital, and market development. At a combined total of \$512,500, several small businesses developed in FY 2014 due to the GMRC Revolving Loan Fund.

Tourism has been an integral part of the Georgia Mountains economy for several decades and continues to be a significant driver of the regional economy. The tourism economy impacts nearly all geographic areas and many businesses throughout the region. Agri-tourism continues to flourish in north Georgia and the rapidly emerging wine industry has expanded its presence in the last year. The U.S. Department of Revenue has approved a new American Viticultural Area in Western NC and North Georgia, known as the Upper Hiwassee Highlands, designating this as a premier wine grape-growing region in the United States distinguishable by geographic features, with boundaries defined by the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB), US Department of the Treasury. This will be **the first AVA in Georgia**. This AVA includes Cherokee and Clay Counties in North Carolina, as well as **Towns** and **Union** Counties in Georgia – making this the 15th AVA that crosses multiple states.

Farmer's markets are flourishing around the region and there is a need for value-added product development opportunities and encouraging people to "buy local" and to develop sustainable and natural-based agri-tourism opportunities.

Research has shown that regions with a highly educated workforce also experience economic growth in terms of business attraction and development, as well as higher income levels for people in the region. Obtaining a college degree or returning to school to receive advanced training is important to assure that skills match the needs of desired employees, and to ensure that workers don't leave the area and keep jobs in the Georgia Mountains Region.

The Georgia Mountains Regional Commission's Workforce Development Department served 578 individuals in the Adult and Dislocated Worker program and 325 youth in the Youth Program. Additionally, the Mobile Training Units assisted 1,300 persons with resumes, pre-employment screenings, etc.

The Georgia Mountains Region is committed to becoming resilient with respect to disaster mitigation and preparedness. As outlined in the report, disaster resiliency can best be defined as the ability to anticipate threats, reduce the impact of these threats by taking preemptive action, respond appropriately and efficiently when these threats materialize, and have a plan in place for recovery. In FY 2014, all 13 counties in the Georgia Mountains Region have submitted their Disaster Mitigation plans to the Georgia Emergency Management Agency and have received approval.

This 2014 Annual Update to the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy is a collaborated, bottom up approach to community and economic development that will help the Georgia Mountains Region grow and prosper now and in the years to come.

In implementing the Five-Year CEDS, the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission has continued its partnership with the Economic Development Administration in encouraging and supporting economic growth in the Georgia Mountains Region. GMRC has actively encouraged the economic development stakeholders in the region to work within the CEDS framework and provided technical assistance to our local communities in their economic development initiatives.

The purpose of this Annual Update is to summarize how GMRC and its economic development partners addressed the Five-Year CEDS goals through the implementation of this past year's programs. The following information summarizes what GMRC and its economic development partners and stakeholders in the region were able to accomplish in FY 2014.

2013-2014 CEDS COMMITTEE

The Georgia Mountains Regional Commission fulfilled its partnership role with the U.S. Department of Commerce – Economic Development Administration through the maintenance of a continuous, comprehensive economic development planning process, support of local economic development projects, and the promotion of new and expanding projects. GMRC has worked with stakeholders in the Georgia Mountains Region to implement the goals established in the Five-Year CEDS document. The activities undertaken this year principally focused on identifying and seeking funding for priority projects, implementation of projects, and supporting the economic development initiatives of the 13 counties and the 38 municipalities that comprise the Georgia Mountains Region.

The Georgia Mountains Regional Commission CEDS Committee met four times during the past year and continued to play an active role in prioritizing projects in the region and endorsing the CEDS Document. The CEDS Committee also provided a forum for representatives of the private sector, local government elected officials, community colleges, and other economic development stakeholders to offer their views and input into the process.

The GMRC wishes to acknowledge the active participation and leadership from its economic partners and CEDS Committee in completing this document:

Charlie Auvermann (Vice-Chairman)
Margaret Ayers
Jerry Boling
Erik Brinke
JR Charles
Doug Cheek
William Chafin (Im. Past Chairman)
Ray Coulombe
Pat Ellis (Secretary)
Gary Fesperman
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Tom O'Bryant
Jane O'Gorman
Kathy Papa
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Cheryl Smith
Annie Sutton
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GMRC STAFF – CEDS COMMITTEE

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Heather Feldman, Economic Development Director
Adam Hazell, Planning Director
John Phillips, Workforce Development Director
Patrick Larson, Economic Development Rep.
Nancy Smallwood, Economic Development Rep.



ECONOMIC CLIMATE/REGIONAL ECONOMY

Encompassing approximately 3,500 square miles, the Georgia Mountains Region is located in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. The region is bordered by North Carolina to the north and South Carolina to the east, while other Georgia counties border the region to the south and west. At a total estimated population of 647,976, the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission serves the following 13 counties: Banks, Dawson, Forsyth, Franklin, Habersham, Hall, Hart, Lumpkin, Rabun, Stephens, Towns, Union, and White and 38 municipalities within these counties.

The Georgia Mountains Region has a diversified economic base in both domestic and international markets. There are many economic drivers in our region, including agricultural, automotive, industrial manufacturing, healthcare, tourism and asset based development, and educational sectors, which provide a stable business climate and environment. All of these factors enhance the quality of life and make the Georgia Mountains Region an ideal place to live and work.

The recent economic trends of the region have been marked by a decline of the goods production sectors and an increase in the logistics and medical services sectors. While this means the employment rates have been generally steady overall, and the volume of amenities and retail options have increased with the number of residents, the loss of manufacturing jobs has hampered the growth of household revenues.

The ten largest employers in the Georgia Mountains Region in 2013 were the following: Fieldale Further Processing, Ingles, Koch Foods of Cumming, LLC, Northeast Georgia Medical Center, Northside Hospital – Forsyth, PCS, Pilgrim’s Pride Corp, Publix Super Market, Inc., Tyson Poultry, Inc., and Wal-Mart.

The one sector that has prospered has been that of tourism. Overall population growth of the surrounding metropolitan area has increased the number of prospective visitors to the region and tourism to the region has increased dramatically. This includes visitors to the abundance of state parks and national forests for recreation, as well as visitors to the historic towns, festivals, wineries, outlet malls, and other regional attractions.

The amenities that have attracted so many people to the area have also led to a change in the predominant demographics of the population. In the metro areas of Forsyth and Hall Counties, the mass influx of employment opportunities has brought with it a higher ratio of minority and Latino households. Conversely, the rural counties to the north and those surrounding reservoirs have attracted a high volume of retirees and seasonal residents.

This section provides an overview of the current economic conditions in the Georgia Mountains Region by updating the statistical data. By providing this “snapshot” of the regional economy, the GMRC can assess the economic conditions and adjust policies to address current problems and to build upon the available economic opportunities.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Efforts to predict the future economic profile of the Georgia Mountains Region can be assisted by an understanding of the historic population growth patterns of the region and the existing population

profile. Through the understanding of current trends, decision makers can better prepare for regional changes in population age, location, and household makeup. Improving the economic health of the region is a common goal and requires policy makers to understand how changes in the region's population will affect the opportunities for economic growth.

The Georgia Mountains Region has grown tremendously over the past several decades. In fact, the Georgia Mountains region population growth exceeded both the state and national rates, and it appears that this trend will continue in future years. Much of the growth taking place within the region is occurring in areas where transportation corridors are present. Other migration factors can be attributed to individual economic factors, retirement population, and urban sprawl and spillover from Metropolitan Atlanta.

According to the Georgia Department of Labor, it is projected that the region's population in 2025 will reach 1,004,395 persons, reflecting a 62.6 % increase. Therefore, the goals identified in the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Five-Year plan are more important than ever in maintaining the balance between growth and the rural character of the region.

EMPLOYMENT TRENDS

Of the total labor force in the Georgia Mountains Region, nine of the thirteen counties in the region enjoyed an increase in the number of people employed. In the four counties that experienced a downturn in employment, these decreases were relatively modest, with only two counties experiencing a change higher than 1.5%. See Table 2 for more details.

TABLE 2 – EMPLOYMENT TRENDS 2012-2013

County	2012 Employment	2013 Employment	Change
Banks	9,604	8,989	-6.40%
Dawson	10,272	10,409	1.3%
Forsyth	88,732	89,918	1.3%
Franklin	8,950	8,819	-1.5%
Habersham	17,787	19,152	7.7%
Hall	83,687	85,333	2.0%
Hart	8,908	8,777	-1.5%
Lumpkin	11,760	11,916	1.3%
Rabun	5,658	5,727	1.2%
Stephens	11,957	12,007	.40%
Towns	5,392	5,054	-6.3%
Union	10,115	10,037	.80%
White	11,757	12,106	3.0%

**Source: Georgia Department of Labor, Area Labor Profile*

UNEMPLOYMENT

The unemployment rate has seen an overall decline in the region.

TABLE 3 – UNEMPLOYMENT TRENDS 2012-2013

County	2012 Unemployment	2013 Unemployment	Change
Banks	670	602	-10.10%
Dawson	859	748	-12.90%
Forsyth	6,455	5,777	-10.50%
Franklin	1,044	922	-11.70%
Habersham	1,716	1,552	-9.6%
Hall	6,734	6,055	-10.10%
Hart	1,098	984	-10.40%
Lumpkin	1,232	1,115	-9.50%
Rabun	774	680	-12.10%
Stephens	1,183	1,033	-12.70%
Towns	473	410	-13.30%
Union	810	708	-12.60%
White	1,140	1,017	-10.8%

Source: Georgia Department of Labor, Area Labor Profile

TABLE 4 – EMPLOYMENT BY SECTOR

Industry	2012 Employment	2013 Employment	Change
Construction	10,018	10,467	4.5%
Education & Health Services	26,156	27,582	5.5%
Financial Activities	6,330	6,464	2.1%
Information	1,991	2,052	3.1%
Leisure & Hospitality	20,131	22,878	13.6%
Manufacturing	35,796	37,360	4.4%
Natural Resources, Mining, & Agriculture	1,561	1,571	.60%
Other Services	4,124	4,135	.30%
Professional & Business Services	22,004	23,277	5.8%
Public Administration	31,785	31,269	-1.60%
Trade, Transportation, & Utilities	41,593	43,754	5.2%
Unclassified	780	688	-11.80%



PLANT CLOSINGS

While the overall economy of the Georgia Mountains Region is on the upward recovery from the recession, several communities have been largely impacted by layoffs experienced by private industries located within their community. These layoffs impact not only the community where the industry is located, but also the adjoining communities in the region where the employees reside. Companies have a responsibility to notify Georgia's Rapid Response Team of impending layoffs and this information is provided to the public as part of the federal WARN system. The number of layoffs in the region during the last year was 351 and was significantly lower than in previously reported years.

<u>Business</u>	<u>Jobs Lost</u>
PSS Dispensing	25
Schreiber Foods	115
CCA North GA Detention Center	125
Sweet Breads, Natalie Janes, Sharky's	26**
Shenanegans Pub	30**
Moschetto's Restaurant	10
Standard Register	10
Toccoa Clinic	<u>10</u>
TOTALS	351

**Denotes loss of jobs due to fire



INFRASTRUCTURE

GOAL STATEMENT: *To provide adequate infrastructure in all areas to support existing business and industry, enable expansion, and recruit new business.*

TRANSPORTATION

Highways and state routes within the Georgia Mountains Region perform several functions vital to the area's economy. Roads provide a connection to the rest of the United States, linking cities and counties, providing a transportation route for exporting goods, bringing in tourist dollars and assisting commuters on their routes to and from work.

Recognizing the need of improving roadways and understanding the importance of transportation to the region's economy, the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission (GMRC) continues to work with local governments to assist with transportation needs and track improvements and new routes added to the area's transportation system.

City or County	Road Improvements
Alto	Resurfaced Hawk Ridge & Porter Street
Baldwin	Resurfaced 3 roads, 15 Roads Crack Sealed
Cleveland	Road entrance improvements
Dawsonville	Regular road maintenance
Helen	Two streets paved, added storm sewer and sidewalks.
Lavonia	Downtown square repaved, construction of street, paving of Hwy. 59 & 77
Lula	Road resurfacing
Toccoa	25 streets paved
Forsyth County	141 resurfaced roads, 46 miles culvert drainage improvements, intersection improvements and road widening
Franklin County	Road resurfacing
Dawson County	Whitmier Road widening, turn lane on SR400, Carlisle Road widening
Habersham County	Updating signs, realigned Runway Drive
Hall County	Resurfacing 20 miles of roadway, turn lane SR13 and Memorial Drive intersection, right of way acquisition for intersection improvements
Lumpkin County	Blackburn and Auraria Road intersection improvements, resurfacing of 18.3 miles of county roads, relocate porting of Roy Grindle Road
Rabun County	10 miles of county roads repaved, 3 miles of new paved roadway
White County	Resurfacing of 8 miles of roadway, paving of .63 miles

The widening of U.S. 129 is an important transportation project in the region. The project will improve traffic flow, increase transportation opportunities and is expected to bring more business to the Georgia Mountains region. Another widening project, SR 17, is part of the Governor's Road Improvement Program (GRIP), which is a system of proposed economic developmental highways in Georgia.

In the fastest growing county in the Georgia Mountain Region, GDOT is also seeking to identify potential improvements along SR 20 from I-575 to SR 400 in Forsyth County. SR 20 is a major east-west thoroughfare on the northern edge of Metropolitan Atlanta, according to GDOT. GDOT is currently gathering public comments on the possible improvements.

The Appalachian Development Highway System (ADHS) includes a total of 142.9 miles in Georgia. Recently, Georgia obligated \$2.1 million federal funds on the ADHS. Current work in the GMRC region includes a location study on a 7.7 mile section running from Blairsville to the North Carolina State line and final design for the State Route 53 interchange.

Transportation improvements submitted in a recent GMRC 2014 survey include the installation of new sidewalks and the paving of gravel roads in the City of Helen, resurfacing of roads in Rabun County, updating roadway signs and road realignment in Habersham County, road rehabilitation and repaving improvements in Stephens County, intersection improvements and resurfacing in Hall County, resurfacing, drainage improvements and McGinnis Ferry interchange improvements in Forsyth County and road widening in Dawson County.



Development of public transit, sidewalk improvement and the increasing of walking and bike paths are also taking place in the region. Rabun County purchased a new transit van for their public transportation system increasing the number of vehicles available in the area. The City of Lavonia completed a project to repair numerous sidewalks surrounding the downtown area making the city a more walkable community. The City of Alto also added sidewalks for walkable areas downtown. Work began in November to extend the Big Creek Greenway a multi-use trail in Forsyth County. The project is a 2.85 mile extension of a trail that will span 6.8 miles in the county.

WATER AND WASTEWATER

Building the region's water and wastewater infrastructure is essential to the development of businesses and the residential community. Several of the region's municipalities and counties leverage federal, state and local monies for the construction or improvement of water and wastewater infrastructure.

City of Baldwin – Water Line Replacement
City of Cornelia – Replacement of undersized lines
City of Lavonia – Raw Water Intake
Forsyth County – Water Treatment Plant
Franklin County – Installation of water lines

City of Toccoa – Water & Sewer Improvements
City of Lavonia – Automated Water Meters
Rabun County – Potable Water Plant
Hart County – 500,000 gallons water tank

ENERGY

The Georgia Mountains Region continues to promote energy efficiency to enhance the region's economic competitiveness. The region recognizes the efforts of the local businesses and industries to include the use of renewable energy resources in their production such as wind and solar.

Energy efficiency rebate and education programs are some of the methods energy providers in the Georgia Mountains region perform to promote efficiency. One of the region's energy providers, Sawnee EMC, will soon be using a solar facility to provide a portion of their power to customers. Sawnee EMC has acquired a 50 percent stake in the total energy produced from a new 20-megawatt solar project location in another part of the state.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Funding for telecommunications projects is a constant need by cities and counties in the region. Access to broadband attracts jobs and high value industries to the Georgia Mountains Region. Many businesses and industries in the area desire data capacity for video applications of distance learning, telemedicine and surveillance, but there continues to be a digital divide between metro areas and rural areas in the region. The region continues to work closely to establish broadband networks. To date these hybrid broadband enterprises have been successful both in partnering with the region's education system and with commercial enterprises.

One of the recent telecommunication projects that was completed was the installation of broadband from the City of Clayton to the community of Rabun Gap. This project is now providing access to residents and two manufacturing firms and one school. The installation of broadband from the City of Clayton to the community of Boggs Mountain is also serving several schools and all of the Rabun County facilities. Another accomplishment includes approximately 50 businesses near the City of Dawsonville benefitting from completed fiber installation in the area. White County reported that two miles of new broadband installation has provided four businesses with connections within the limits of the county.

SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT

Promoting responsible stewardship and updating waste disposal plans, encouraging waste reduction and recycling continues to be a priority for the Georgia Mountain region. Staff at the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission support planning and economic development that promotes revitalization and good stewardship of the region's natural resources.

Several of the region's counties and municipalities are affiliated with the national Keep America Beautiful (KAB) organization. The organization offers solutions that create clean, beautiful public places, reduce waste and increase recycling, generate positive impact on local economies and inspire generations of environmental stewards.

Through programs and public-private partnerships, KAB engages individuals to take greater responsibility for improving their community's environment. Hall, Dawson, Forsyth, Hart have individual programs and Towns, Union, Lumpkin and Banks Counties belong to a regional organizational effort called, Keep Our Mountains Beautiful.



BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY

GOAL STATEMENT: *To stimulate and strengthen the regional economy through a collaborative effort embracing global trends resulting in job creation and retention, capital investments, and thereby enhancing the tax base and quality of life in the Georgia Mountains Region.*

TOURISM

Tourism plays an important role throughout the Georgia Mountains Region driving significant business growth and revenue for companies. With moderate climates, advanced transportation infrastructure, long travel seasons, and diversity of attractions, tourism related businesses in the Georgia Mountains Region are able to leverage attractions for both in and out-of-state visitors to increase sales and revenues. According to the Georgia Department of Economic Development, tourism is a \$51.2 billion industry in the State of Georgia. The Georgia Mountains Region is third in annual travel volume by domestic visitors behind only Metro Atlanta and the Georgia Coast. Visitors to the region are attracted by the abundance of outdoor activities, numerous state parks and historic sites, museums, wineries, and mountain arts and crafts just to name a few. Highlights from FY 2014 are noted below.

- ❖ According to the Georgia Department of Economic Development, approximately 7 million people visit Lake Lanier and approximately 11 million people visit Lake Hartwell.
- ❖ House Bill 318 – amending the Georgia Tourism Development Act, a state tax incentive program to expand and encourage more tourism attractions. The project must cost a minimum of \$1 million and attract 25 percent of its visitors from out of the state by its third year and not directly compete with existing Georgia's businesses.
- ❖ At an economic impact of \$5.1 billion in 2013, the film industry in Georgia continues to flourish. In fact, according to the Georgia Department of Economic Development, Georgia is ranked one of the top five in the country as a production destination. The region hosted several major motion pictures and network television shoots, including *Blended*, starring Adam Sandler and Drew Barrymore. The natural and scenic beauty and rural downtowns make the mountain region an ideal place for filming.
- ❖ Agri-tourism continues to flourish in north Georgia and the rapidly emerging wine industry has expanded its presence in the last year. There are approximately 15 wineries and vineyards in the Georgia Mountains Region and the number is increasing every year.
- ❖ A number of river outfitters have started a business and are thriving in the region, and river running is still a major draw in northeast Georgia.
- ❖ Currahee Military Weekend recently won the Southeast Tourism Society's Top 20 Events.



- ❖ USA Weekend designated the City of Dahlonega as one of the 10 best Summer Weekend Escapes.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP & SMALL BUSINESS

The Georgia Mountains Regional Commission Revolving Loan Fund (GMRC-RLF) was very active in FY 2014. The program works in partnership with the Economic Development Administration (EDA) and allows GMRC to assist Region 2 in creating and retaining jobs in our market. As a local economic development initiative, the RLF Program helps expand the Region's economy through the creation and retention of jobs.



The Revolving Loan Fund is available to businesses of all sizes and varieties. Borrowers are eligible for financing only when credit is not otherwise available. Since inception, the program has loaned out a total of \$4.5 million to 63 businesses throughout the Georgia Mountains Region. Those investments have translated to just over 535 jobs being retained or created.

In FY 2014, the GMRC received several inquiries into the RLF Program. Of those inquiries, seven applications were submitted and reviewed by the staff. Five of the seven applications were analyzed and approved by the RLF committee. The GMRLF Program was able to support community growth in industries such as: food industry, insurance, millwork, accounting, and car services. In FY 2014, the RLF Program loaned a combined \$512,000.00 to businesses in the GMRC Region. The GMRLF Program currently has 15 active loans totaling approximately \$1.2 million.

AGRI-BUSINESS

- ❖ The Georgia Poultry Laboratory Network is constructing a new science laboratory and headquarters in the new Gateway Industrial Centre to fulfill an important food-safety role for Georgia's poultry industry.
- ❖ In FY 2014, strategic planning and application development began to bring a regional Food Hub to the Georgia Mountains Region in Rabun County. This initiative is known as the Whole Community Food Network – an innovative model bringing together a food bank, farms, communities, educational institutions, nonprofits, and businesses. Other counties in the project include Habersham, Stephens, Towns, and White. Creating a food hub in the Georgia Mountains will leverage capital investment and help farms access new markets in a coordinated effort.
- ❖ The U.S. Department of Revenue has approved a new American Viticultural Area (AVA) in Western, NC and North Georgia, known as the Upper Hiwassee Highlands AVA. An AVA is a designated wine grape-growing region in the United States distinguishable by geographic features, with boundaries defined by the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau, U.S. Department of Treasury. This is the first AVA in the State of Georgia and includes Towns and Union Counties.



- ❖ In partnership with the Northwest Georgia Regional Commission (NWGRC), Northeast Georgia Regional Commission (NEGRC), and Three Rivers Regional Commission, the GMRC completed the Local Food Assessment for the Appalachian Region in Georgia. Local food stakeholder forums were held to gain feedback from interested parties and to bridge the gap between the producers and the consumers and to discuss future steps.

HEALTHCARE

- ❖ Northeast Georgia Medical Center (NGMC) in Gainesville was recently designated as a Level II Trauma Center. The hospital fills an important gap in the statewide trauma care network, working to ensure that north Georgia residents are never far from a designated trauma center.
- ❖ Stephens County Hospital has added a new wound care center providing specialized treatment for chronic or non-healing wounds.
- ❖ North Georgia Technical College – Currahee Campus has expanded its health program, constructing the health science wing.
- ❖ One new Urgent Care facility opened in Rabun County and created 38 jobs.

EXISTING BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY

- ❖ King's Hawaiian, a state-of-the-art bakery and distribution company is doubling its size of its facility in Oakwood by constructing an additional 120,000 square foot expansion. Upon completion, King's Hawaiian plans to add nearly 400 new jobs and triple its current production output.
- ❖ An automotive supplier – Kautex of Georgia, Inc. is adding a 95,000 square foot warehouse to its existing facility in Franklin County. The \$3.3 million investment was completed in May 2014.
- ❖ Parkdale Mills announced in October 2013 that they are expanding their production plant in Rabun Gap, creating 210 new jobs and investing \$85 million in investment.
- ❖ Field Services Engineering announced their decision to locate and expand in the Gateway III Industrial Park in Hart County. The project will create 50 jobs at a total investment of \$3 million.

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

GOAL STATEMENT: *To attract and retain business and industry by promoting education and workforce development.*

Research has shown that regions with a highly educated workforce also experience economic growth in terms of business attraction and development, as well as higher income levels for residents in the region. Obtaining a college degree or returning to school to receive advanced education and training is important to assure that skills match the needs of desired employers. To ensure that workers don't leave the region, it is imperative that there are jobs to support a well-educated and highly skilled workforce.

Priority issues for the Education and Workforce Development Sub-Committee included the following:

- ❖ Despite increased opportunity for educators to partner with businesses in workforce training and development, there remains a disconnect between education provided and employment opportunities.
- ❖ The need for increased computer skills among the adult and entry-level workforce in order to be competitive.
- ❖ To retain highly qualified employees, the region needs to attract or create business opportunities in various growth sectors of the economy.
- ❖ To attract quality employers that can help transform the economy, the region must raise education attainment levels of adults, as well as increase the overall skill base of the workforce.

The Georgia Mountains Regional Commission Workforce Development Department provides day-to-day management of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funds that are allocated to the Georgia Mountains Region through the Georgia Department of Economic Development. The department continues to provide oversight of training providers who provide job training and job placement to eligible persons. This department provides assistance to adults, youth, and dislocated workers who meet program criteria. ***A new bill was passed through Congress and signed by President Obama to dismantle the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 and replace it with the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act, which will take place on July 1, 2015.***

ADULT AND DISLOCATED WORKER

- ❖ GMRC Workforce Development (GMWD) Adult and Dislocated Services department served **578** individuals in FY 2014. Training for individuals 18 years or older was provided by Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funding. WIA funding allowed these individuals to attend a technical school or college for up to 24 months to receive specialized training to enter today's competitive job force in a Growth and Demand field in the Georgia Mountains.



- ❖ GMWD entered into a new field of training this past year with a grant from the Governor's Office of Workforce Development. GMWD partnered with Arrendale State Prison and Goodwill Industries of North Georgia to provide 13 transitional inmates the opportunity to receive training in both traditional and highway construction. This was a successful partnership as all 13 participants completed the program with 4 being offered full-time jobs in the transportation construction field before graduation.

ON-THE-JOB-TRAINING



- ❖ Georgia Mountains Workforce Development's On-the-Job Training Program (OJT) assists employers with training costs while putting Georgians back to work. On-the-Job Training provides employers with the opportunity to train new employees and receive up to 90% reimbursement for their salary during the OJT training period. OJT helps employers fill the gap between a potential employee's current skills and what is required to fully perform the job.
- ❖ GMWD has placed 7 adults in new careers with 5 different employers during the first year of the On-the-Job Training Program. Our participants have received training in such positions as Administrative Coordinators, Low Voltage Technicians, Welders and Implementation Specialists.

MOBILE TRAINING UNITS

- ❖ Georgia Mountains Regional Commission office of Workforce Development operates two Mobile Training Units (MTU's) in support of Rapid Response, Adult Dislocated Worker, Youth, and On-the-Job-Training. The MTU's have assisted over 1,300 individuals since July 1, 2013. The MTU's are equipped with on-board satellite and wireless capability and have assisted individuals search and apply for jobs, develop resumes and cover letters, take career interest surveys and assessment, and discover training opportunities.



YOUTH ACTIVITIES

The GMWD has served 325 youth in the Youth Program during FY 2014.

- ❖ 2014 Summer Work Experience
 - 89 youth started Summer Work Experience
 - 84 youth successfully completed
 - 94% Completion
- ❖ Summer Work Skills Workshop
 - 6 Youth started
 - 6 youth successfully completed
- ❖ Tutor Programs:
 - Franklin, Habersham, Hall (Chestatee High School & Project SEARCH) Hart, Franklin, Union, Towns (still working on tutor program in Dawson)
 - Potential Program starting at East Hall Community Center
- ❖ Y.E.A.R:
 - Banks, Hall, and Hart Counties
 - Potential Program in progress in Lumpkin
- ❖ Credit Recovery Assistance:
 - Hall, Hart, Franklin, Rabun, White, and Stephens Counties
- ❖ GED Training in the Gainesville Regional Youth Detention Center. The program provides a tutor to WIA qualified youth to work on their GED combined with a learning coach to teach valued Life Skills that will improve their chances of success upon release.

HOUSING

GOAL STATEMENT: *Facilitate the availability and accessibility of affordable workforce housing and facilitate coordination of housing development with planning for infrastructure and overall community development for long-term sustainability.*

The Georgia Mountains Region is experiencing a rebound in housing development and sales after experiencing a deep lull during the recent recession. The mountains and lakes spurred strong growth in the second/seasonal home market, and early signs suggest that workforce housing will be more affordable in the near term and that senior housing will continue to be a sharp need.

For the 2014 update, the CEDS Housing sub-committee acquired housing data from real estate agencies that have a presence within the Georgia Mountains Region. This data for the region's 13 counties can be found throughout the document.

Average Active Sales Price of a Home- April-June 2013 vs. April-June 2014			
County	Sales Price- April-June 2013	Sales Price- April-June 2014	% Change
Stephens*	\$299,000	\$517,000	72.9%
Union*	\$291,000	\$473,000	62.5%
Habersham*	\$371,000	\$499,000	34.5%
Franklin**	\$169,977	\$206,806	21.7%
White*	\$282,000	\$304,000	7.8%
Forsyth*	\$408,000	\$418,000	2.5%
National Inflation Rate of 2.1% (June 2013-June 2014)			
Dawson*	\$407,000	\$413,000	1.5%
Hall*	\$427,000	\$428,000	0.2%
Lumpkin*	\$298,000	\$295,000	-1.0%
Rabun*	\$1,370,000	\$1,221,000	-10.9%
Hart**	\$269,648	\$222,645	-17.4%
Towns*	\$498,000	\$345,000	-30.7%
Banks**	\$292,051	\$171,132	-41.4%

*Source: FMLS and GMLS Data Provided by The Norton Agency

**Source: GMLS Data Provided by Coldwell Banker- Fort Realty

The data in the table above is being compared to the national Inflation rate of 2.1% to provide a barometer of the general health of each county's real estate market. Counties that are adjusting at a rate greater than inflation (Stephens, Union, Habersham, Franklin White, and Forsyth) signify a more robust market. Conversely, those with adjusted rates less than inflation (Dawson, Hall, Lumpkin, Rabun, Hart, Towns, and Banks) signify a weaker market. The data shows that 8 of 13 counties have higher average active sales prices for their homes for the most recent quarter (April-June 2014) than they did at the same quarter the previous year (April-June 2013).

Housing data from the second quarter (April-June) of 2014 shows over 300 more homes are now on the market for sale than the second quarter of 2013. On a county-by-county basis, 10 of 13 counties (Towns, Habersham, Union, Forsyth, Dawson, White, Hall, Franklin, Lumpkin, and Stephens) had as many or more homes for sale in the second quarter of 2014 when compared to the second quarter of 2013.

2014 Local Government Housing Survey

The main goal of the CEDS Housing sub-committee is to provide resident's access to available workforce housing. Sub-committee members have continued to express their desire to establish an inventory of the region's current housing supply. In Fiscal Year 2014, a survey instrument was distributed to all 51 local governments in the Georgia Mountains Region in an effort to identify the region's housing needs. The purpose of the survey was to identify each government's community housing needs in order to achieve its desired economic developments goals and/or growth.

Survey Results: General Housing Trends

- Most survey respondents were satisfied with their current housing supply as it relates to their community's needs.
- Respondents that were dissatisfied with their current housing supply identified single-family, multi-family, senior, and special needs housing as their primary housing needs.

Survey Results: Housing Quality and Policy

- Survey results found that most governments in the region do not track constituent complaints
- Approximately 50% of respondents noted that they do track code violations
- This information will help GMRC staff work with member governments on improving housing standards and neighborhood revitalization

Survey Results: Community Housing Needs

Survey results indicate the need for the following:

- Single-family housing to attract young people and their families to the community
- Owner-occupied housing
- Senior housing, including assisted living facilities for the region's aging population
- New or rehabilitated workforce housing for prospective employees and their families



- More business development to bring these employees to the community

Project Spotlight: City of Gainesville Housing & Residential Lot Assessment



Good House from Assessment



Dilapidated House from Assessment

The Georgia Mountains Region is very fortunate to have engaged governments who explore innovative ways to improve quality of life for their residents. A shining example of this government action in the area of housing is the City of Gainesville. The City has partnered with Georgia Mountains Regional Commission to perform a Residential Housing and Survey Assessment, which is being funded by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs. Completed in July 2014, the purpose of this project was to assess all housing units within the City of Gainesville to determine which areas had minor, major, or critical defects.

A grade of good, fair, deteriorating, or dilapidated was assigned to each unit, which gave an honest assessment of the overall housing needs. This information was then mapped and color coded according to the assessments. This allowed the City to utilize this information to determine which housing units could be rehabilitated and which units should be demolished for new residential construction. During the project, 3,058 properties were assessed out of a total of 6,747 residential properties which allowed the City to adequately identify the health of its neighborhoods. The City has responded swiftly in pursuing effective tools to revitalize neighborhoods throughout Gainesville and improving the quality of life for its residents based on the assessments.

HomeSafe Georgia Update

In June 2014, the Georgia Department of Community Affairs released a summary of unemployed and underemployed homeowners who have been recipients of temporary mortgage payment assistance through the agency's HomeSafe Georgia program. A total of 199 recipients in the Georgia Mountains Region have received temporary mortgage payment assistance from the program. Over 45% of these homeowners are from Forsyth County. The other leading counties for homeowners assisted are Hall County and Dawson County. The statewide data shows that the majority of assistance is being provided to homeowners that live in counties closest to Metro Atlanta. There is an opportunity to market this program to the region's smaller, more rural counties outside the Metro Atlanta area.

2014 Public Housing Authorities Survey

Earlier this year, Congress passed bill H.R. 3547, which includes the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Appropriations Act of 2014. In this bill, Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) are now required to establish flat rents at no less than 80% of the fair market rent (FMR). The previous standard required PHAs to establish a flat rent at no less than 60% of the FMR. In response to this new legislation, an additional survey was prepared this year to be distributed to all PHAs in the Georgia Mountains Region to get their feedback on how this new legislation might adversely affect their tenants and monthly rental rates. Survey results revealed mixed feelings on the new legislation:

- One respondent from one of the region's small, rural communities is concerned that its tenants will not be able to afford the new flat rent due to their fixed incomes.
- Another concern is the new flat rent rates will prohibit these individuals from having an occasional meal at a restaurant to visit with others because a larger percentage of their fixed income will go their rental obligations.
- Another PHA concurred with these same concerns, adding, "...we have had many residents already move out of Public Housing and find private rentals for the same amount as the new flat rates or, in some cases, for less than the implemented rates."
- This same PHA continues, "my fear is that our PHA is losing the higher paying renters who have almost become self-sufficient and will replace them with families or individuals paying little to no rent."
- Another PHA, however, did not seem too concerned with the new legislation, revealing that it has board-approved flat rents on an annual basis and that this new legislation would not affect its tenants.
- PHAs adversely affected by the change are "phasing in" these new rates to mitigate the financial burden on residents.

PRE-DISASTER MITIGATION

GOAL STATEMENT: *“Encourage disaster resiliency, extending beyond emergency responsiveness to planning and organizing in advance to address these vulnerabilities, and to enable rebuilding and recovery afterwards in ways that offer healthier, sustainable, and more robust regional economies.”*

The Georgia Mountains Region is committed to becoming resilient with respect to disaster mitigation and preparedness. Disaster resiliency can best be defined as the ability to anticipate threats, reduce the impact of these threats by taking preemptive action, respond appropriately and efficiently when these threats materialize, and have a plan in place for recovery. These threats can be natural events (weather related) or technological threats, such as hazardous material accidents, pandemic diseases, terrorism, etc. and can greatly cause an economic disruption or collapse within a community. The Georgia Mountains Region’s resilience will be determined by the magnitude and severity of such threats and the region’s capacity to contend with them based on its inherent vulnerabilities and available resources.

One aspect of regional resiliency that should be emphasized is the increasingly interconnectedness and interdependence across a broad array of critical infrastructures, notably in energy, telecommunications, transportation, water, and wastewater treatment systems, emergency services, government services, healthcare and hospitals, agriculture and food systems, etc.

In an effort for the Georgia Mountains Region to achieve and sustain disaster resiliency, the region should adhere to the following:

- ❖ The region should be able to anticipate that there may be multiple hazards or threats to their citizens and their property/landscape. These hazards might be non-routine episodic events such as tornadoes, floods, pandemics, or terrorist attacks. Cumulative events such as drought are also susceptible in the region.
- ❖ The region should understand its physical, economic, and social vulnerabilities to these hazards and take mitigating action to reduce their impact.
- ❖ The region should be able to respond to events as they happen, mobilize resources, and coordinate relief efforts.
- ❖ The region should be able to organize itself through the stages of emergency response, restoration, reconstruction, and community betterment.



The Georgia Mountains Regional Commission assisted all 13 counties with their Hazard Mitigation Plans and as of June 30, 2014, all 13 plans have been approved by the Georgia Emergency Management Agency (GEMA).

In addition to the hazard mitigation plans, the following projects were either initiated or completed during FY 2014.



- ❖ **City of Royston** - The City of Royston received \$30,450 in funding from GEMA for the installation of a Mass Notification System/Warning Siren
- ❖ **City of Hartwell** – The City of Hartwell received \$42,500 in funding from GEMA for the installation of a Mass Notification System/Warning Siren.
- ❖ **City of Cornelia** – The City of Cornelia received \$146,376 in Assistance to Firefighters Grant funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.
- ❖ **Stephens County New Hope Fire Station** – The Stephens County New Hope Fire Department received \$17,765 in Assistance to Firefighters Grant funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.
- ❖ **Towns County** is a fire adapted community.

REGIONAL PRIORITY PROJECT LIST

The CEDS Priority Project List represents a major component of the overall CEDS effort. These projects are funded by multiple funding sources and each one addresses a specific goal or goals within the CEDS. All of the listed projects are important to the local communities and have been included because they help move the Georgia Mountains Region closer to its vision. A limited number of projects are eligible for EDA funding and will be reported when initiated or completed.

The list of issues and projects outlined below is comprehensive, but by no means exhaustive. The list reflects the participant's ideas, concerns, and efforts and is expected to be continually updated as new projects emerge and existing projects are completed.

GOVERNMENT	PROJECT	FUNDING SOURCE(S)	AMOUNT
BANKS COUNTY	Wastewater Treatment	GEFA/USDA/Local	\$5,000,000
	Water System Upgrades	CDBG/Local	\$500,000
	Martin Bridge Sewer	ARC/EDA/USDA	\$3,000,000
	Fiber Infrastructure	ARC/OneGeorgia	\$5,000,000
	Banks Crossing 109 Infrastructure	OneGeorgia/ARC	\$500,000
Town of Homer	Water Upgrades	ARC/EIP/CDBG	\$1,500,000
	Firefighter Safety Equip.	FEMA-AFG	\$300,000
	Fire Station	USDA/Local	\$1,000,000
City of Maysville	Renovation of City Hall	USDA/Local	\$1,500,000
	Park/Trail Development	DOT-TE	\$500,000
	Ridgeway Waterline Improvement	Local/SPLOST	\$180,000
DAWSON COUNTY	Etowah River Road Improvements	DOT/Local	\$500,000
	Bridge Repair	DOT/Local	\$700,000
	Road Improvement Project	DOT/Local	\$1,500,000
	Blanchard Development	ARC/EDA/EIP/1GA	\$4,500,000
	Shiery Development	ARC/EDA/EIP/1GA	\$2,500,000
City of Dawsonville	Sewer Expansion	ARC/Local	\$600,000
	Sewer Expansion – Company Expansion	ARC/GEFA	\$600,000
	Housing Rehabilitation	CDBG	\$1,000,000
	Walking Trails	DNR-RTP	\$250,000
FORSYTH COUNTY	Business Expansion	CDBG-EIP Loan	\$500,000



	Wastewater Expansion	EDA/Local	\$10,000,000
	McGinnis Ferry Interchange	DOT/EDA/FHA/Local	\$36,000,000
	Water Expansion/Water Plant	EDA/Local	\$2,000,000
	Major Road Widening	EDA/Local/SPLOST	\$45,950,000
	Traffic Safety Improvements	Local/SPLOST/DOT	\$2,500,000
	Intersection Improvements	EDA/Local/SPLOST	\$4,600,000
FRANKLIN COUNTY	Sewer Collection/WWTF	USDA/ARC	\$6,374,000
	Central Franklin Industrial Park	ARC/SPLOST	\$2,000,000
City of Carnesville	ATV/Recreation Trails	DNR/Local	\$250,000
City of Franklin Springs	Sewer System Improvements	ARC/Local	\$700,000
City of Lavonia	Raw Water Intake	ARC/Local	\$991,000
	Northern Sewer Trunk Line	EDA/ARC/Local	\$1,400,000
	Automated Water Meter	GEFA	\$500,000
	Firefighter Equipment	FEMA-AFG	\$500,000
	Lake Hartwell Increased Allocation	GEFA/ARC	\$1,000,000
City of Royston	Infrastructure Improvements	CDBG/Local	\$500,000
HABERSHAM COUNTY	Infrastructure – Industrial Park	ARC/Local	\$620,000
	Partners for Growth, Inc. – Entrepreneurship Dev.	Local/GDEcD	\$50,000
City of Clarkesville	Water Improvements	CDBG	\$500,000
	Streetscape	DOT-TE	\$750,000
	Public Safety Facility	USDA/Local	\$2,000,000
	Firefighter Equipment	FEMA-AFG	\$500,000
City of Cornelia	Water Improvements – Phase 4	CDBG/Local	\$700,000
	Firefighter Equipment	FEMA-AFG	\$500,000
	Road Improvements	ARC/Local	\$350,000
	Water & Sewer – Fieldale	ARC/EDA	\$2,000,000
	Sewer Improvements – Neighborhood	CDBG	\$800,000
City of Demorest	Sewer System Improvements	ARC/Local	\$600,000
Town of Tallulah	Rails to Trails-Bridge	ARC/Local/GDEcD	\$500,000



Falls			
	Bartram/Appalachian Trail Connection	ARC/Local/GDEcD	\$200,000
	Water/Sewer Infrastructure	ARC/Local/GEFA	\$3,000,000
	Terrora Building Solar Panels	ARC	\$400,000
HALL COUNTY			
City of Lula	Road Improvements	DOT/ARC/Local	\$600,000
City of Oakwood	Sewer Improvements	CDBG-ITAD	\$225,000
	Water & Sewer – Company Expansion	OneGeorgia	\$105,000
	Industry Way Extension	ARC/Local	\$400,000
City of Gainesville	Roosevelt Square Renovation	Local	\$250,000
	City Signage	GDEcD	\$200,000
	Midtown Greenway – Phase 2	DNR, TE, Local	\$625,000
	Midtown Greenway - Phase 3	TE, DNR, Local	\$120,000
	Midtown Greenway – Phase 4	Local, TE, DNR	\$1,000,000
	Neighborhood Revitalization	CDBG/Local	\$2,000,000
	Senior Center	Private, Local, CDBG	\$1,244,400
	City wide Fire Equipment & Buildings	FEMA, GEMA, Local	\$10,000,000
	City Wide Upgrade of Parks/Playgrounds/Recreational Areas	DNR, Local, Bonds	\$20,000,000
	Airport Improvements	GDOT/FAA/Local	TBD
	Stormwater Planning	Local	\$200,000
	City Wide Storm Drainage & Road Improvements	TE, GDOT, Local	\$50,000,000
HART COUNTY	Sewer Expansion	GEFA	\$400,000
	Infrastructure Expansion	ARC/EDA/EIP	\$2,500,000
	Hart State Park	DNR, ARC/Local	\$500,000
	Pre-Treatment Facility	EIP/Local	\$800,000
City of Hartwell	Mass Notification System	GEMA-EMPG	\$75,000
	Railroad Street Project	CDBG-RDF/ARC/Local	\$1,200,000
	Sewer Expansion	CDBG-EIP/ARC/Local	\$500,000
	Farmer's Market	ARC/Local	\$225,000
Town of Bowersville	Water Improvements	OneGeorgia/Local	\$200,000
LUMPKIN COUNTY	Water Improvements	CDBG	\$558,000
	Water & Sewer Improvements	ARC/Local	\$600,000



	Broadband Expansion	CDBG-EIP	\$160,000
City of Dahlonega	Sewer Plant Upgrade	ARC/GEFA/Local	\$4,000,000
	Park Dev./Trails	DNR-RTP	\$250,000
RABUN COUNTY	Water Improvements	CDBG-ITAD	\$150,000
	Business Park Improvements	CDBG-EIP/ARC/Local	\$2,000,000
	NEGA Food Hub	EDA/ARC/Private	\$2,500,000
	US441 Widening	DOT/Local	\$10,000,000
	Potable Water Plant – Business Park	ARC/EIP/GEFA	\$3,000,000
	Sewer Line Sky Valley to Dillard	ARC/GEFA/USDA	\$1,000,000
	Water Line Distribution System	GEFA/ARC/Local	\$2,500,000
City of Clayton	Downtown Infrastructure	ARC/Local	\$428,300
City of Mountain City	Drainage Improvements	CDBG/Local	\$500,000
City of Sky Valley	Sewer Infrastructure	ARC/Local	\$600,000
	Road and Drainage Improvements	CDBG/ARC/Local	\$500,000
STEPHENS COUNTY	WWTF	CDBG-EIP/ARC/OneGA	\$2,500,000
	High School Road Project	Local	\$1,000,000
	New Platform – Depot	ARC/Local	\$1,000,000
	Memorial Drive Upgrades	DOT/Local	\$500,000
	Road Improvements	DOT/Local	\$2,000,000
	Water Supply & Distribution	ARC/GEFA	\$1,500,000
	Wastewater Collection & Treatment	ARC/EDA/GEFA/USDA	\$5,000,000
	Broadband	OneGeorgia/Local	\$6,000,000
City of Toccoa	Veterans Parkway/Big A Infrastructure Improvements	ARC/EDA/GEFA/OneGeorgia	\$4,000,000
	Natural Gas Extension	Local	\$100,000
	Camp Toccoa Renovation	ARC/Local/Private	\$109,000
TOWNS COUNTY	Sewer Improvements	Local/ARC/EDA	\$4,000,000
City of Hiawassee	Water & Sewer Improvements	ARC/GEFA/OneGA	\$500,000
City of Young Harris	Sewer Improvements	ARC/Local	\$300,000



UNION COUNTY	US129 Connector	DOT/Local	\$10,000,000
	BHR- Amphitheater	OneGA/Local	\$500,000
	BOE – PAES Lab	ARC/Local	\$23,652
City of Blairsville	Infrastructure Improvements	CDBG-EIP/ARC/Local	\$600,000
	Water & Sewer Upgrades	ARC/Local	\$1,100,000
WHITE COUNTY	Water Extension/Fiber	CDBG-EIP	\$500,000
	Road/Fiber	CDBG-EIP/ARC	\$500,000
	Infrastructure – Bypass	ARC/EDA/CDBG-EIP	\$1,500,000
	Technology Park		
	Broadband Extension	ARC/Local/Private	\$400,000
City of Cleveland	Water Tank	ARC/Local	\$500,000

